

THE COUP D' ETAT - PS. 3:1-8

THE LIFE OF DAVID IN THE PSALMS #14

Human history often turns on seemingly fragile hinges. Small events sometimes bring about great consequences. One cannot help but wonder how the history of the former Soviet Union and the world it affected would have been changed if Leon Trotsky would have succeeded Lenin instead of the ruthless Joseph Stalin. Trotsky was the logical choice. He had been Lenin's right hand man. He had been the one largely responsible for the early stability of the socialist regime.

But when Lenin died in 1924, the cruel Stalin quickly grabbed power. He recognized Trotsky as his chief rival and began to hunt him down like an animal. Trotsky ran from country to country seeking exile, but nobody seemed to want to welcome him. Finally, Leon found a home in Mexico where he built an imposing fortress with a 15 foot brick wall and guard houses just outside Mexico City. He would wait until the time was right and then take what should have been rightfully his.

But Joseph Stalin was not a man to leave an enemy alone. That very summer, a man who called himself Frank Jackson showed up at Trotsky's fortress. In reality, he was one of Stalin's assassins. Through well trained lies, he gained Leon's confidence. And then in an unguarded moment, he drove a mountaineer's pick ax through the back of Trotsky's head. The coup d' etat was complete. Joseph Stalin was in full power. And the nation of Russia, many surrounding nations that would be annexed and the whole world would suffer decades of terror

because of one man's lust for power.

A coup d' etat is an unsettling experience for any country. When somebody tries to wrest control from the established authority, it seems like everybody gets nervous. There are many questions left unanswered for a time. What kind of government are we going to have now? How will the new leadership affect me and my family? Will the change bring about prosperity or chaos and anarchy?

Last Sunday evening, we looked at the **spiritual and moral lowpoint** in the life of King David. We saw how David was able to find restoration in his fellowship with God and get back on track spiritually again.

This Sunday morning, we look at the **political lowpoint** in the life of King David. Up to this point, David has known nothing but political success. He ascended to the throne when it was almost not worth having - for to be the king of Israel just meant that a bulls-eye was painted on one's chest for the Philistines to shoot at. But David by courageous leadership and skillful administrative skills had quickly built a great nation. He won battle after battle. He subdued nation after nation. Soon, the nation of Israel was no longer the doormat of the middle east. Now, large quantities of gold and silver were pouring in annually in tribute. Even David's spiritual struggles hadn't appeared to hinder the growth of the empire. While David was struggling internally back in Jerusalem, Joab was leading the armies in defeating the Ammonites. So David had really never known political defeat – that is until the coup d' etat happened.

Now it is amazing that this coup could ever had gotten off of the ground in the first place. After all, the nation of Israel had never been in better shape

politically. Why would Israelites try to overthrow the man who had done so much for their nation? And the leader of the coup was Absalom - David's own son. But as amazing as it seems, it happened. David had slowly lost touch with the pulse of his subjects as his kingdom had expanded and he had more and more administrative concerns. Absalom had slowly won the hearts of many as he listened to their problems and concerns with a sympathetic ear. Finally, Absalom had been able to organize a large enough band of willing followers to drive King David from his royal residence in Jerusalem - and for a period of time, Absalom became the functional king of the nation of Israel.

David wrote 2 Psalms that are found back to back in our English Bibles responding to this humiliating episode in his life. They are Psalms 3 & 4.

The first one, Psalm 3 was written very shortly after King David fled the city of Jerusalem. Many commentators feel that there is a distinct possibility that it was written on the very morning of the battle between David's army and Absalom's army - the conflict that would determine the future of the nation of Israel. We are going to look at Psalm 3 this morning, and the Lord willing, we will conclude this Summer series by looking at the 4th Psalm on the Sunday evening of September 10.

Psalm 3 is divided into 3 distinct sections - each section concludes with the word *Selah*. This Hebrew term means to pause and reflect. It was likely used as either a pause in the reading of the Psalm or a pause in the singing of the Psalm where there would be a musical interlude by the instruments.

The theme that weaves through this Psalm like a thread is **FEAR**. This does

not surprise us. For we would expect the dominant emotion that a king who has just been deposed from his throne and who is running for his life might experience is fear. Now the emotion of fear was not a new one for David. He undoubtedly experienced fear as a young lad when he was tending his father's sheep and looked around to see a lion or a bear lurking about the camp. He certainly experienced fear as a teenager when he chose to face the giant Goliath. I am sure that there was at least the thought that flashed in David's mind as he was beginning his walk out to meet Goliath - *What have I got myself into now?* We know that David faced the emotion of fear many times as he was running from Saul as a young man in his 20's for he wrote about these emotions in other Psalms.

But the fear that David faced now as an older man was different. Before, as a younger man, he had everything to gain and nothing to lose. He could afford to take risks, big risks, without that much to lose because he really didn't have anything. But now, just the opposite was true. David had been the king for several decades. He had built the empire up into a formidable force. Now, he had everything to lose and very little to gain. He could lose his throne, his family, and his life. And even if he won this battle against Absalom and his army, he would probably lose his son and go back into the city of Jerusalem having been greatly humbled. No wonder David was filled with fear. He didn't know what the future held for him or for the nation of Israel which he loved so dearly.

As we have now seen many times, David provides a wonderful example for us in facing the difficulties of life. He was a man after God's own heart. And here in Psalm 3, we find a powerful model in facing fear successfully.

Now certainly we don't have the exact same fears that David faced here. None of us is anticipating fighting a life and death battle with swords and spears this next week. But we surely do have struggles that generate the emotion of fear in our lives. Every parent has faced the fear of a child who chooses a destructive path in life like David's son Absalom did here. And most of us have laid our heads down on our pillows and tried to sleep with the awareness that we will have to face a major struggle the next day. Perhaps that struggle took place in a surgeon's operating room, perhaps that struggle took place in our boss' office at work, perhaps that struggle took place in a classroom where we took that final exam, but whatever our particular struggle, we have to successfully win the victory over fear first if we are to have the opportunity to be at our best in the battles of life.

Let's look together at how David handled fear in his life.

1. The first segment of this Psalm shows David's willingness to face his fears honestly. READ Ps. 3:1,2

O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! ² Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." Selah

Now David was in trouble here politically, and he knew it. Absalom had been able to muster a formidable army around his mutinous cause. Later on in the Psalm, David speaks of 10s of thousands. If this Psalm were written on the day of the critical battle as many believe, David realized that he had a formidable task ahead of him. And it must have hurt him deeply that so many of his fellow countrymen for whom he had risked so much in the past would have now joined the opposition against him.

But in addition to the mere numbers of his opponents, their reasoning really bothered David as well as he mentions it in verse 2. God is no longer with David. God's blessing has departed from David. God is no longer on David's side. How these rumors must have hurt that man who is called *the man after God's own heart*.

Now David could have responded to this threat in many ways. He could have chosen to live in the past, glorying in all of the victories that he had achieved. He could have surrounded himself with *yes men* who would just bolster his ego and confidence and deny the realities of the surrounding threats. But David didn't choose these self-deceiving paths. He freely admitted the danger that he was in and the fear that he felt.

Many people never have the opportunity to gain the victory because they won't first admit the reality of the enemy. Many people continue with addictions that greatly hinder their lifestyle because they deny that there is any problem. Many families are more willing to continue in a dysfunctional lifestyle than they are to face the reality of a problem. Many individuals are hindered in their own personal growth and achievement because they will not admit or face weaknesses in their lives. It is really fear in each case that is the jailer. Like David, we must be willing to admit and face our fears if they are to be overcome.

2. But notice now the second segment of this Psalm. David did not allow his feelings of fear to immobilize him, but he rather chose to put his trust in the delivering power of the Lord. READ Ps. 3:3,4

³ *But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.* ⁴ *To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.*

Selah

As David the great general is thinking of the critical battle of the day, his mind begins to think in military metaphors.

*The Lord is a shield to protect him from all surrounding danger. How important the shield was in these days. It was the major protection that a soldier had in battle. He would use the shield both to deflect the arrows and spears that were shot at him and as his only means to catch the wielded sword of the enemy in hand to hand combat. Just as the shield was an indispensable part of the soldier's armor, so David confesses the Lord to be his shield, both physically and spiritually.

*The Lord was the giver of glory. The Hebrew term *glory* literally means *heavy*. Again, it has military connotations. When the troops left for battle, they travelled light so as not to wear themselves out. But if they were successful, they returned heavy, they returned with glory, they returned with large portions of gold and silver and other plunder that they had captured from their defeated enemies. We give glory to God when we make him heavy with our praise and our adoration. David here expresses the confidence that God was going to give the victory to him and bring glory upon him once again.

*The Lord was also the one who could replace his shame and humiliation with honor once again. David says the Lord would lift up his head. The picture is of a child who has come back into the house after a particularly humiliating experience. Perhaps he has fallen off his bike and skinned his knee or been punched in the nose by a neighbor bully. His head is down in shame and

humiliation. But what does mom or dad do? They put their hand under that chin, lift up his head, wipe the tears from his eyes and tell him it's going to be alright. That's what God was doing for David here in this Psalm. It must have been such a humiliating experience for David to be driven from his throne and capital city by his own flesh and blood. But God lifts up his head and says, *It's going to be alright David.*

*God was personally concerned with David's predicament and always ready to hear and answer his prayer. *To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.*

You see, while admitting freely his dangerous situation and the fears that he was feeling, David chose to put his trust in the only one who could help him at this time - the Lord. He acknowledged the Lord as his protector, the Lord as the only one who could return his throne and glory to him, the Lord as the one who could lift up his head and the Lord who was personally concerned for his situation.

3. So the first segment of this Psalm shows David's willingness to admit his difficult situation and the second segment emphasizes his choice to put his trust in the Lord. Notice in closing now with me the third segment where David testifies to some of the results that occurred in his life because of the decision that he had made to trust in the Lord. READ Ps. 3:5-8

⁵ I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. ⁶ I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. ⁷ Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. ⁸ From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your

people. Selah

a. The first result that David speaks about here is sleep. What a practical blessing this was from the Lord. A good night's sleep. And when we consider the historical setting, David's statement here is even more remarkable. The tenses here indicate that the sleep has already happened - probably the night before. Now if it is true that this Psalm was written on the morning of the day of battle with Absalom's forces, I think we would all consider it noteworthy that David had a good night's sleep the previous night. It would not be natural for him to have a sound night of sleep the night before such a critical battle. But even if this wasn't the very night before the battle, any good night's sleep in his unsettling circumstances would have been unusual. But David was able to sleep because he had put his trust in the Lord. David knew that God was awake, so he could sleep.

b. The second result was serenity. *I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. vs. 6.*

The situation was still dangerous. But God had freed David from his fear. So David could respond to the situation with clarity of thought and action. Someone once said, *God doesn't promise to always change our circumstances, but He does promise to always change us.* David experienced this truth in his life. The battle still had to be fought, but he could engage in it without debilitating fear.

c. A third result was salvation. *Arise, O Lord. Save me - deliver me.* God is a saving God.

*God has made the provision for our eternal salvation through the sacrifice of his one and only son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*God continues to offer his salvation throughout our life as we face our dangerous circumstances in his strength and power.

*But that salvation is only experienced as we face our fears realistically and put our faith and trust in Him. We can then have the freedom to sleep and to have God's serenity and salvation.

Helen Keller is one of the most remarkable people in human history. Although she was both blind and deaf, she learned how to read and communicate with others. Eventually, Helen Keller would write fluently and with keen understanding. One characteristic of Helen's life that enabled her to achieve so much more than anyone ever thought that she could was her courage to face life's fears. In conclusion this morning, I am going to read for you a dramatic illustration of Helen Keller's courage as told in Peter Seymour's book entitled, *Courage*.

When Helen Keller, in front of the lion cage at the zoo, said she was going inside to get better acquainted, she was told it was absolutely impossible. This particular lion was tough, just in from Africa. But Helen gave reasons for her desire to go inside. She had been studying all she could about lions and was sure she could manage. Somehow, she got her way. The lion was surprised. He had never seen a human being like this one. Of course, he couldn't understand that here was a famous woman who was not only blind. She was deaf as well. But he could sense perhaps that she had the gift of empathy, of identifying herself with other creatures. Anyway, as she stretched out her hands inquiringly and started walking directly toward him, he offered no resistance. In front of him, she kneeled

with a sort of contagious reverence for the way he was put together. Down his back she ran her sensitive fingers. Yes, the mane was just as the books had described it and so was the fur on the tail. But what was this at the very end? This tuft of long hairs. Nobody had mentioned that. How interesting, she chuckled. The exploring touch went down one leg to the paw. The lion cooperatively lifted it. She felt the claws, one after the other, then the pad, up and down. Here, that's enough, said the lion with a great roar. But Helen Keller couldn't hear although the vibrations must have startled her. Showing no shock or anxiety, she continued testing each paw and leg muscle. Finally, satisfied, she stood up and lifted her hands in a gesture of wonder and admiration. Taking her time, she found her way to the door of the cage and rejoined her friends who were once more breathing freely.

Most people would consider being in an enclosed cage with an African lion to be a threatening experience. I know I would. Most people would be frozen with fear. Most people wouldn't remember much at all about the experience except for the times waking up screaming after having a nightmare. But then none of us would experience the exhilaration that Helen Keller had actually coming into physical contact with the King of Beasts.

Whatever the fear that you are facing this morning, allow God to give you freedom and allow life to be an exhilarating experience for you.

*Face your fear courageously - admit it

*Choose to trust in the Lord - he is greater than any life-threatening situation.

*Accept his gifts of sleep, serenity and salvation into your life.